

Jakob Klundt (1839-1921) Baptist, colporteur, missionary, Bible bookseller and pastor

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Foreword

My great-great-grandmother Beatha Graf, born Klundt, was probably born between 1842 and 1846 in Neu-Danzig (Beresan, Kherson Governorate, southern Russia). Unfortunately, I have not yet been able to find out the exact date, as the Neu-Danzig church register records only begin in 1847. During intensive research on the issue of "Baptism in Neu-Danzig and in Cataloi", I came across various sources from which I was able to compile a complete curriculum vitae of Jakob Klundt and which suggest that my great-great-grandmother Beatha Graf born Klundt must have been a sister of Jakob Klundt. Jakob Klundt had such an eventful and interesting life that I would like to tell the readers about it.

Baptist in Neu-Danzig and Cataloi

Jakob Klundt was born as the second child of Johann Georg Klundt and Elisabeth born Feiock/Feicht on February 8, 1839 in the German colony of Rohrbach (Berezan, Cherson Governorate, southern Russia). Jakob Klundt is a descendant of Johannes Klundt (*19.05.1759 Wollmesheim, Palatinate +08.10.1833 Rohrbach, Southern Russia) and Eva Katharina born Hu(h)st (*03.01.1762 Wollmesheim +14.01.1837 Rohrbach), who emigrated with their family from Wollmesheim in the Palatinate to Southern Russia in 1809 and arrived in the Rohrbach colony on October 15, 1809.

In 1842, Jakob Klundt's family moves from Rohrbach to the recently founded German colony of Neu-Danzig. Neu-Danzig belongs to the parish of Nikolajew and is located on the Ingul River. Jakob Klundt marries Regina Elisabetha Achtenberg(er) (*20.05.1834 Nikolajew) in Neu-Danzig on August 21, 1859. Their daughter Maria is born on August 10, 1860. The family regularly attends the meetings of the new religious movement inspired by the Mennonites in Einlage (Chortitza colony, southern Russia). On May 1, 1862, Jakob Klundt speaks the word of God so forcefully that he is converted on the same day. On February 25, 1863, their son Jakob was born, who died on September 19, 1863.

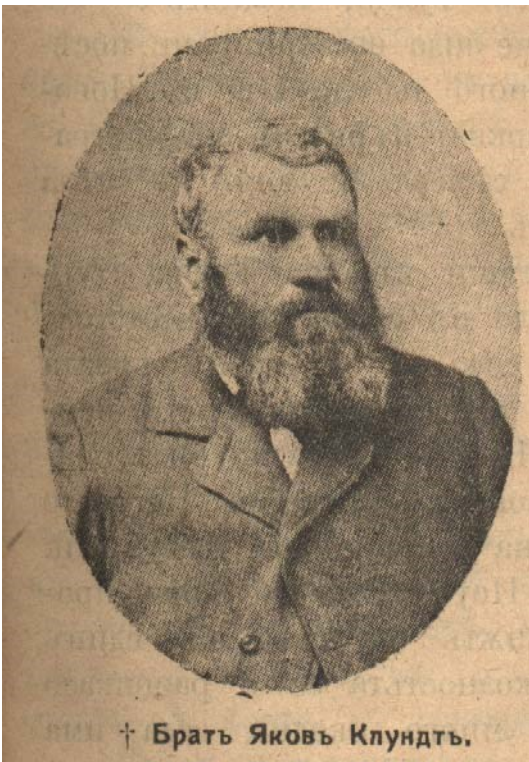


Image 1: Brother Jakob Klundt
Image from Teodor Oprenov

At the beginning of 1864, the young Mennonite brothers Gerhard Wieler and Benjamin Bekker visit the village of Neu-Danzig. On May 3, 1864, the two Mennonite brothers hold a prayer meeting in a private house. They convince the participants of baptism by immersion, as practiced by the Baptists. Shortly afterwards, Gerhard Wieler accomplished the first baptism of faith in Neu-Danzig on Pentecost 1864. A total of 11 people were baptized. Jakob Klundt and presumably his wife Regina were among those baptized. The new religious movement is viewed very critically by the local clergy and other villagers. The Baptists were slandered and harassed, with the result that Jakob Klundt and other men were arrested in August 1864. The prisoners send a petition to the Russian government. When this reached the Tsar, he ordered his immediate release. Jakob Klundt returns to Neu-Danzig. On October 1, 1864, his son Friedrich is born, who dies on May 16, 1865. This death entry is the last entry in the Neu-Danzig church register for Jakob Klundt and his family. The slander and harassment of the Neu-Danzig villagers against the Baptists continues. Jakob Klundt and some of his fellow Baptists therefore leave southern Russia. The Turkish Pasha in Tulcea takes in the exiles and assigns them Cataloi in Dobruja as their new place of residence.

Colporteur and missionary in the Balkans

The Baptist families meet regularly for assemblies in Cataloi and found the first German Baptist congregation in Dobruja in November 1869.

In 1870, Jakob Klundt came into contact with Dr. Alexander Thomson from the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS). Jakob Klundt becomes a colporteur (= bookseller for the distribution of the Bible and Christian literature) of the BFBS, which sends him to Skopie in Macedonia, where he arrives in August 1872 after an arduous journey with his entire family. Over the next 8 years, he traveled through Macedonia, Serbia and Albania, selling his Christian literature and preaching the Gospel. As a result of his work, he often came into conflict with the Orthodox and Catholic churches and the local authorities and was repeatedly arrested. He was once arrested in Albania, transported to Skopie and then on to Saloniki (now Thessaloniki) and imprisoned. From prison, he appealed directly to the English consul in Thessaloniki. He intervened and managed to have Jakob Klundt released from prison. Other times he was banished from Saloniki and Skopie. However, none of these experiences stopped him from selling his Christian literature and preaching the Gospel to the people. When Turkish troops committed horrific massacres among the Serbian population in 1876, he reported this in detail to Dr. Thompson in Constantinople. During this time, his children August and Elisabeth were born.

Bible bookseller and pastor in Lom

After 8 years on the road as a colporteur and missionary, Jakob Klundt is transferred to Lom in Bulgaria and arrives in the city on August 11, 1880, where he settles as a Bible bookseller for the BFBS. On April 14, 1884, his son Wilhelm was born, who later moved to Berlin, started a family and became a member of the Baptist congregation in Berlin-Friedrichshagen.

Jakob Klundt does not limit his activities to his Bible bookshop, but also travels around Lom and preaches the Gospel in many villages. Many villagers are converted and baptized. During this time, several outposts of the Lom Baptist Church were established in the surrounding villages.

In 1887, Jakob Klundt traveled privately to Hamburg and attended the Baptist preacher's seminary. There he met the young Bulgarian Georgi Chomonev. Jakob Klundt invites Georgi Chomonev to return to Bulgaria with him and help with the preaching ministry in Lom. Chomonev agrees and settles in Lom in the same year. As long as Jakob Klundt was traveling and preaching in Bulgaria, the Baptist meetings continued to take place in the Klundt home. A close relative of Brother Chomonev reports: *"When Brother Klundt traveled through the kingdom, the meetings were held by the other two. Sister Regina Klundt read the Holy Scriptures in the morning and preached - Brother Chomonev in the evening"*.

In April 1888, Sava Lecev was baptized and in 1891 married Jakob Klundt's daughter Maria, who had recently become a widow.

The 1890s were not easy for Jakob Klundt and the Baptist congregation in Lom. The existing Baptist congregations in Lom, Kazanlak, Sofia, Russe and Tulcea (in the area of the Bulgarian exarchate) began to split. In the congregations in Russe and Tulcea, the members are predominantly German, while in Lom, Kazanlak and Sofia they are mainly Bulgarians and Russians. The "German" congregations in Russe and Tulcea are supported by the German Baptist Union in Hamburg, but the "Bulgarian" congregations in Lom, Kazanlak and Sofia are not. They therefore turned to the American Baptist Missionary Union for support.

At the beginning of the 1890s, the meeting room in Jakob Klundt's house became too small. The meetings were then held for a short time in Georgi Chomonev's house. During this time, it became clear that the congregation needed its own "place of worship". Jakob Klundt and Georgi Chomonev therefore set up a special fund for the purchase of a building, which was saved from the Lomer Baptists' own funds. In 1893, a suitable house was found in the Kaletto district near the Danube. The purchase price corresponded to a value of 1071 golden leva. On February 19, 1895, a gang of rioters destroyed the Lomer Baptist chapel and stole the money boxes. All Bibles, hymnbooks and other papers are thrown into the Danube and destroyed.

In April 1896, after many years of tireless work, Jakob Klundt's greatest wish came true: the Bulgarian state recognized the Lom Baptist congregation as an official church. In June 1898, the new Baptist chapel in Lom is consecrated. The *Täuferbote* No. 8 of August 1936 reports as follows.

"How the city authorities of Lom in Bulgaria had to build a chapel for the Baptists for free.

A contribution to the history.

Of the five brothers, Johann and Friedrich Engel, Christian Gschossa (Neureuther's note: the correct name is Christian Krzossa), Jacob Klundt and Martin Heringer, who were expelled from Russia in 1864 for their faith and were the first Baptists to come to the then still Turkish Dobruja, the last named also came to Lom in 1875, but went to Rustschuk two years later. (Two men were converted by him, George Iskrenoff, baptized in Bucharest by Aug. Liebig on 12 March 1874 and Philipp R. Kamenoff, baptized with his wife in Lom on 1 May 1875 by Ludwig Liebig). Another of those five men, Jacob Klundt, then came to Lom from Macedonia in 1880. In 1888, Sava Leytscheff, (Neureuther's note: this is Klundt's son-in-law Sava Lecev) Trifon Babanoff converted. Spas Steffanoff and others and thus a station was founded in Lom on July 10, 1888. During this time, the first Bulgarian preacher was Vasil Martscheff. He probably suffered damage from the blows he received on his head for the sake of the Gospel. He still lives in Hamburg under the name Vasil Christoff.

For the first 11 years, the brothers and sisters in Lom gathered in Brother Klundt's house. Then they began to collect money for their own house of prayer and raised 1071 gold leva. The chapel was then built in 1893. After about 2 years, on Sunday, February 19, 1895 in the afternoon, when Sunday school had just ended and the children had gone home, a crowd of people with the priests approached the chapel, shouting loudly, and began to smash the windows and doors and destroy the roof. Bibles, pews and hymn books were thrown into the Danube, as the chapel was not very far away. The two brothers Leytscheff and Borkowski, who were still present, fled. Borkowski fled to a Turkish family friend, where he found shelter from the raging crowd, because the Turk stood at the door of his house with his hatchet raised, as no one is allowed to enter a Turkish house without the man's permission, because no other man is allowed to see his wife unveiled. So the crowd turned to Brother Klundt's house and wanted to cause destruction there too. But in the meantime the police arrived and prevented it.

Brother Klundt then traveled to Sofia to the German consul and had him lodge a complaint with the ministry, and so the ministry ordered the city administration in Lom to build a new church for the Baptists. This was done, with pews and a pulpit much nicer than the old one. After everything had been completed, the town council came and politely handed over the new chapel to the congregation and asked if they had any other wishes so that they would be completely satisfied. The congregation accepted the beautiful chapel with heartfelt thanks to the city authorities and to God and gathered in it for many years. Unfortunately, it no longer stands, as the congregation moved house and built a much larger chapel a few years ago to match its current size. But a number of the benches from that chapel are still in use today in the youth hall of the congregation in Lom."



Image 2: Baptist chapel in Lom, dedication Juni 1898 - image from Teodor Oprenov



Image 3: Family Jakob Klundt in Lom 1898 - image from Emil Nechifor



Image 4: Family Sava Lecev and Jakob Klundt in Kazanlak 1918 - image from Emil Nechifor



Image 5: Front page „Der Evangelist“, edition März-April 1921 - image from Teodor Oprenov

After 28 years as a colporteur and bookseller for the BFBS, Jakob Klundt retires at the end of 1900. His son-in-law Sava Lecev takes over his work at the BFBS and the bookshop. In the years 1905-1908, Jakob Klundt negotiates with representatives of five other Baptist congregations about a union of Baptists in Bulgaria. In 1908, the "Union of Bulgarian Baptist Churches" was officially founded as an organization. 1911 Jakob Klundt receives a visit from Reverend Chas. T. Byford (Continental Commissioner of the Baptist World Alliance). Byford describes Klundt as a small, bearded and blue-eyed man. In his book "Peasant and Prophets", Byford reports on Klundt's life and ends with the words: *"He is seventy-two years old, has been in prison in many countries for the sake of the gospel, undertakes perilous journeys in bitter cold, that Christ may be preached, that the saving Gospel may reach these lands, including the 'Macedonian cry'. Nothing seems to discourage him; he has only one goal! One thing in life he is striving for, one goal he is always moving towards - that Christ will reign in the Balkans and HIS name will be over all nations."*

In the years before the First World War, Jakob Klundt also began to preach the word of God to the Sinti and Roma population group. Some of them attended the meetings in the Baptist chapel in Lom and were baptized by Jakob Klundt.

After 58 years of "service for the Lord", Jakob Klundt retired from active service in 1916 and moved in with his daughter Maria Lecev, who lived with her family in Kazanlak. He spent

the last years of his life there and died on March 28, 1921 at 5 a.m. at the age of 82.

A detailed obituary appears in the March-April 1921 issue of the magazine "Der Evangelist". The obituary is headed by the following Bible passage: *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* (John 8:12). I am sure that Jakob Klundt lived his faith with this precisely promise and died with firm confidence in it.



Image 6: Baptist chapel in Kazanlak 2020 - image from Teodor Oprenov

Note: Please also read the detailed report on the emergence of Baptism in Neu-Danzig (Southern Russia) and Cataloi (Dobruja, Romania)

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Sources of the images:

1. Brother Jakob Klundt - image from Teodor Oprenov
2. Baptist chapel in Lom, dedication Juni 1898 - image from Teodor Oprenov
3. Family Jakob Klundt in Lom 1898 - image from Emil Nechifor
4. Family Sava Lecev and Jakob Klundt in Kazanlak 1918 - image from Emil Nechifor
5. Front page „Der Evangelist“, edition März-April 1921 - image from Teodor Oprenov
6. Baptist chapel in Kazanlak 2020 - image from Teodor Oprenov

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